The 'Recall' approach has been shown to have many benefits both for elderly people in institutions and also for the staff who care for them. Even severely mentally impaired elderly people have shown an interest in the images and there is some evidence to suggest that they can lead to an extension in the scope of reminiscence or at any rate a greater willingness or ability to communicate.

In one case which the Reminiscence Aids Team observed in a ward for severely mentally infirm patients, an elderly man, Joe, suffering from confusion, came back seven or eight times to watch the presentation. He would sit down behind the people who were showing the programme and during the repeat performance he would chat to the nursing officer and member of the project team. At first there was no indication that the presentation stimulated any extra reminiscence. Joe was asked more or less the same questions repeatedly and almost invariably gave the same answer: 'I don't remember, it was a long time ago.' At one point, however, having seen the sequences several times, he suddenly answered the question 'What were the air-raid shelters like?' with the direct answer, 'Very crowded.'

Whether the response was caused by repeated exposure to the visual stimulus or whether it was due to the continual questioning and general conversation and activity which surrounds the presentation does not really matter. In any case Joe was sufficiently interested by the sequence to watch it many times – on several occasions putting on his glasses to study a particular slide.

'Recall' is being widely used by therapists and psychologists to work with elderly people in residential homes, hospitals and day centres but the 'Recall' approach also provides the adult educator with many opportunities.

Education has two almost paradoxical functions – to help us to adapt and cope with our environment and also to expand our horizons. Nowhere is this of greater importance than for elderly people living in residential homes or geriatric wards. However, the adult educator coming in to an institution to provide classes is faced with a number of problems which are exacerbated by the fact that the group may well be beset with problems of physical and mental frailty in varying degrees. In addition, the deadening effect of institutional life can often

mean that the first task is simply to help people to rediscover their ability to communicate. In institutions which are not accustomed to educational activities, the staff, too, may not always understand or appreciate what is being provided.

The Adult Educator will be on firmer ground if he or she has a way of getting to know the group and building on their interests and abilities and is able to bring the staff in on the activities and rely on them to sustain interest and involvement between classes.

The 'Recall' package, or similar collection of material, can provide a stimulating introductory session for both staff and residents or patients which may be enjoyable and productive in itself in breaking down prejudices and barriers, but more importantly can provide pointers for future activities.

One day centre in North London developed a range of activities based on the childhood sequences which involved making collages and scrap books recalling past days. Several of the members recalled making kites as children and some of the group resolved to do this and go and fly them in the local park.

With the stimulus of 'Recall', elderly people at an East End day centre reconstructed a grotto from memories of childhood. (Stephen Whaley)

Another group remembered the East End childhood pastime of making 'grottos' outside their homes out of cigarette cards, coloured paper and other bits and pieces. They recreated one on the wall of the day centre and one man demonstrated how they would ask for pennies from the men returning from work. When this was recounted in *YOURS*, the magazine for older people, many readers from various parts of the country sent in their memories of making grottos, a custom which seems to be connected with the Feast of St James the Great on 25th July. Traditionally this marked the beginning of the oyster season, then a poor man's food. Perhaps the custom survives from the days of the pilgrimages to the shrine of St James at Compostella in northern Spain. His emblem is the cockle shell.

All this interest and information arose out of the 'Recall' approach and this example demonstrates the wealth of avenues for educators to pursue – drama, arts and crafts, writing: autobiography, plays, poems, local history and oral history are some of the activities which lend themselves readily to this approach. The end product may be plays, exhibitions, murals, books or leaflets or tape recordings.

The potential sources of help are many and various: local history societies, public libraries, local press and radio, local industry, museums, relatives, volunteers, voluntary and religious organisations, local art and technical colleges and schools. These may all be prepared to help in some way with research, loans of pictures, sounds or equipment or with 'leg work' in the locality or by promoting the end product of the project.

The 'Recall' approach offers opportunities for people of all ages and talents and can help bring the outside community closer to an institution if not bring it within the four walls. But, most important, the 'Recall' approach is centred on the elderly people themselves – their abilities and resources – and it is their contribution which will determine the course and outcome of the various projects.

Notes

1 The report of the DHSS project, *Reminiscence Aids: The use of audio-visual presentations to stimulate memories in old people with mental infirmity*, may be consulted in the DHSS Library, Alexander Fleming House, Elephant and Castle, London SE1.

2 Lewis, C. N. 'Reminiscing and Self-concept in Old Age', *Journal of Gerontology*, 1971, Vol. 26, 2.
3 Butler, R. N. 'The Life Review: An interpretation of reminiscence in the aged', *Psychiatry*, 1963, Vol. 26, 1.
4 *Recall – A Handbook* and the three parts of the slide/tape sequences 'Recall' are published by Help the Aged Education Department, 318 St Paul's Road, London N1.

11
Pre-Retirement Education: A Biographical Approach*

Joanna Bornat

Pre-retirement education has been subjecting itself to a process of reappraisal and self-criticism. In part the reasons for this are external. The effects of earlier retirement, increased economic activity amongst older women and the advent of long-term unemployment for older workers are beginning to have an impact on courses whose origins lie in a period of greater economic prosperity and a more male-oriented perception of employment and retirement. However, there are also criticisms developing within pre-retirement education which suggest a rejection of the training package approach which has been typical of some courses over the years.

Bringing together industrial or commercial conceptions of education with those of some adult education tutors has often been only a partially successful process. Research shows that too many courses are still run for large groups drawn from a wide range of grades on the eve of retirement, with the prime objective of imparting information aimed at the resolution of predetermined problem areas and producing the recurring themes of savings, health, exercise, safety and leisure.

Critics arguing for a reappraisal of pre-retirement education are emphasising the need for a long-term approach, small groups and a shift away from fact-giving by experts. By encouraging a focus on individual perceptions of self, work, society and opportunity, an emphasis is being placed more on an education which is self-directed, investigative and which is

* A longer version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the British Society of Gerontology at Exeter University in September 1982.

dependent for its success on the development of group discussion and a group indentity.

A biographical or life history approach would seem to have obvious relevance to developments of this type. By encouraging individual group members to consider their past lives, the focus is shifted away from the professional experts, the providers, and towards the individual's own needs and interests both perceived and unperceived. A biographical approach may provide an opportunity to express doubts and uncertainties, particularly if other group members are able to relate their own experiences and make comparisons and suggestions.

Recent developments in the field of pre-retirement education seem to suggest a fruitful basis for a biographical approach. Research carried out by Allin Coleman and Chris Phillipson[1] indicates the general need for more sensitive and flexible approaches to the planning and running of pre-retirement courses. In particular, the recommendations made by Chris Phillipson and his co-worker at Keele are particularly encouraging to the use of life history on a pre-retirement course. By emphasising that people learn from their peer groups, and by encouraging peer group formation in factories and offices, a crucial role for life history would seem to be indicated.

Concurrent with these recommendations has been the production of materials for the Open University course, Planning Retirement. The written course material divides into four sections with the first two of these, 'Taking Stock' and 'Making Changes' using biographical exercises to encourage someone approaching retirement to recognise major life events and the changes which she or he has already survived. In constructing the course the Open University team emphasise that developing an awareness of the breadth of life experience and discovering patterns in life which suggest continuity are essential to coping with the changes brought about by retirement. It is hoped that by considering their own biographies, students will be able to reflect on, for example, health events, changes in financial circumstances and different patterns of community involvement during their adult years.

The giving or eliciting of a life history or biography has several implications for pre-retirement education. Firstly, giving an account of the past in terms of personal, individual,

experience can have the effect of turning round a relationship, with the informant acquiring a change in status *vis à vis* the investigator, interviewer or reader. The individuality of the experience related is a challenge to fixed or predetermined perceptions and creates a more interactive process of investigation or understanding.[2] Secondly, in developing an understanding of the meaning of such apparently highly differentiated material as a series of life histories or biographies, much attention has been given to the idea of the cohort. The work of Glen Elder[3] and others has drawn attention to the need to articulate various aspects of historical processes, including specific events, long-term and short-term economic change and shifts in political structures, with the life chances of groups of individuals born at certain times. In his own work he has contrasted the effects of the Depression years on two cohorts, one born during the Depression years, the other having already reached adolescence at this time.

The giving of a life history or personal experience of past events is frequently accomplanied by some degree of emotion. In most cases people appear to express enjoyment as they recall forgotten incidents from their early lives or once again describe experiences which are important to them. There is often pleasure, too, in the realisation that what they are imparting is valued and has significance for others. In reminiscence sessions with very elderly people, the fact that their memories have a relevance for younger people and the community at large gives pleasure and helps to encourage or renew a sense of being valued and contributing to what is going on. There are, of course, occasions when recalling the past can lead to the expression of painful emotions. For the listener, interviewer or even a reader, this can sometimes be a difficult situation to manage. In discussing the use of 'Recall' (tape/slide sequences covering the last eighty years of life in Britain) with groups of workers concerned with the care of elderly people, we, at Help the Aged Education Department, frequently encounter the objection that reminiscence is upsetting and therefore harmful to older people. However, it seems to be the view amongst psychologists, psychogeriatricians and care staff who have experienced and coped with strong emotional reactions, that even though painful, such emotions are usually better expressed than denied.[4]

In an interesting though contrasting use of life history, social workers concerned with the care of young children have demonstrated an additional area of therapeutic value. A recent article in *Community Care*[5] shows how, by describing their short lives in scrapbook form, quite young children selected for long term fostering or adoption are encouraged to develop a positive sense of their own identities, interests and origins.

There are many examples of the ways in which the very old and youngest members of society can gain from the experience of giving or constructing a life history. Until now the positive or therapeutic aspects of a biographical approach to the past have tended to be restricted to these age groups. The recognition that the use of biography can have significant and beneficial results at other stages in the ageing process, particularly in the context of the transition out of the labour market, suggests a third reason for its relevance in a pre-retirement context.

A fourth reference point for biography in a pre-retirement context is the recognition that in retelling a life history an individual can become aware of the many facets of his or her own life. Once placed in a collective or group situation the opportunities for building a broader understanding of one's own past and experience are greatly enhanced. This would seem to be particularly important for women whose lives have seemingly been redirected or reshaped by marriage or maternity. The rediscovery of an earlier self may be important at a time when further changes are imminent.[6]

The four points which I have emphasised in looking at life history are: the encouragement of a more interactive role, the significance of a cohort experience, possible beneficial or therapeutic aspects and finally, the opportunity to broaden or develop an individual's sense of his or her own past.

There may be concern that opportunities for reminisence may result in undirected or unproductive discussion on a pre-retirement course. Or there may be concern that lack of confidence, a sense of achievement or negative self-esteem may inhibit free exchanges. But these are problems which any adult education tutor will recognise, though in a pre-retirement context they may become even more active. People, men and women, who are being prepared for an exit from the labour market into an uncharted territory of unknown economic,

social and psychological dimensions, with some exceptions, tend to show signs of defensiveness and deference, particularly when confronted by experts. It is here that the challenge lies as far as the course organiser is concerned.

A life history approach allows changes to be discussed, gives people opportunities to dwell on experiences outside or parallel to work and encourages a cohort approach to retirement. Above all, though in itself an individual product, when integrated into a group discussion, biography can help to counteract the very individualising process which retirement represents. The loss of social relationships generated by work, the loss of status attached to occupation and the current preparation for retirement which emphasises individual security, both financial and physical, tend to have an isolating effect on men and women at this point in their lives.

Groups obviously vary and the amount of direction or encouragement required will also vary. Exercises in life history should naturally be chosen with care. 'Two minute biographies', 'Turning points', 'This is your life' and the 'Road map of life', have proved successful with different groups.[7]

Alternatively, groups could be encouraged to bring to meetings photographs of themselves at particular ages, or to embark on a 'Where were we all when . . .' session.

The success or enjoyment of such sessions depends on the group and the timing of the sessions. I am not suggesting that pre-retirement courses include total self-revelation or the primal scream; what I would suggest are a number of preconditions:

- small groups of up to fifteen people drawn from like grades or sections;
- experimentation with different groupings of men and women taken separately and then perhaps together;
- courses which run over a number of years, preferably starting at age 50;
- courses run with a view to course members' eventual control or determination of course content;
- course tutors or organisers with a strong pastoral commitment to group members;
- course tutors or organisers who have developed a close

familiarity with the objective cohort experience of their group of retirers. Currently, this means a familiarity with the 1930s, the Second World War and post-war society – relating these periods of time and change to different stages in group members' lives. An awareness of contemporary history and economic and social changes and the different ways these have affected women and men from a representative range of cultural backgrounds would be an essential.

Within such a framework of prerequisites, sessions drawing on the biographies of group members should help to strengthen a sense of identity for individuals, encourage group support and help reveal areas of expertise, interest and experience. All or any of these developments could be used to support further sessions of group biography, an exploration of local associations or services, an appreciation of the impact of changing financial circumstances, joint leisure pursuits and educational opportunities in retirement. We might even move towards an English version of the Swedish 'Dig Where You Stand' movement,[8] initiated in Sweden amongst groups of workers by Sven Lindqvist.

The opening up of individual experience to group discussion presents a challenge to PRE as it exists today. If based in cohort groups it may require support and a degree of flexibility which some employers may feel unwilling to finance. From an employer's point of view this may seem to be the underwriting of an open-ended experience rather than the purchase of a recognisable training package. Nevertheless, I would argue that it is in this direction that PRE must go if it is to provide employees with the opportunity to make a success of changes in their lives and if they are to emerge from the retirement process with self-confidence and the ability to get from society what they need and want.

Notes

1 Phillipson, C. 'Pre-Retirement Education: The British and American experience' in *Ageing and Society*, Vol. 1, Part 3, November 1981; Coleman, A. *Preparation for Retirement in England and Wales*, 1982.

2 Johnson, M. *Ageing, Needs and Nutrition*, 1980; Oakley, A. 'Interviewing Women: A contradiction in terms', in Helen Roberts (ed), *Doing Feminist Research*, 1981; Portelli, A.

'The Peculiarities of Oral History', in *History Workshop Journal*, No. 12, Autumn 1981.

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4 Butler, R. N. 'The Life Review: An interpretation of reminiscence in the aged', *Psychiatry*, Vol. 26. 1, 1963; Lewis, C. N. 'Reminiscing and Self-concept in Old Age', *Journal of Gerontology*, Vol. 26. 2, 1972; Havighurst, R & Glasser, R. 'An Exploratory Study of Reminiscence', *Journal of Gerontology*, Vol. 27.2, 1972.

5 Ryan, T. 'Telling It How It Really Is', *Community Care*, 25 February 1982; Ryan, T. & Walker, R. *Making Life Story Books*, 1982.

6 For an examination of the ways in which personal biographies and professional careers can interact see: Johnson, M. 'Professional Careers and Biographies' in R. W. J. Dingwall (ed), *The Sociology of the Professions: Lawyers, doctors and others*, 1982.

People's history and oral history have revealed the many dimensions of individual lives. In *D for Doris, V for Victory* (1981), Doris White writes about her war-time experiences as a factory worker. Similarly, but using the interview method, the pattern established in reconstructing the repertoire of a Devon singer suggests a closer involvement with workmates and different types of employment than is displayed in the context of the songs' performance, the village pub. This is described in Richards, S. 'Bill Hingston: A biography in song', in *Oral History*, Vol. 10. 1, 1982.

7 See Brandes, D. & Phillips, H. *The Gamesters Handbook*, Hutchinson, 1977.

8 Lindqvist, S. 'Dig Where You Stand', in Paul Thompson (ed), *Our Common History*, 1982. Subtitled 'How to Do Research on a Job', Sven Lindqvist's manual suggests ways in which groups of employees can investigate the history of their industry. This has had a popular following in Sweden with many industry-based groups writing and researching their past.

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Retired people now represent one-sixth of the population of the United Kingdom. How far are their needs for active leisure being met?

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Susanna Johnston was formerly Education Director for Help the Aged and is now reading for the Bar.
Chris Phillipson is Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Adult Education, Keele University.

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